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ABSTRACT

This document presents a Michigan State Advisory Council for Vocational Education report on the status of, and need for, career and vocational guidance in the schools. It discusses projected changes in the labor force; decreases in the number of youth entering the workforce; and increases in the numbers of high school dropouts, pregnant teenagers, and unemployed youth which all will have implications for career/vocational guidance and counseling. It reviews the state of vocational and career guidance since 1965 and presents eight recommendations for vocational guidance based on results of the College Board's 2-year study of counseling. Recommendations contained in the Michigan State Board of Education Policy and Position Paper on Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling are also presented. A model comprehensive guidance program designed to teach all youth and adults the career development skills of information gathering, decision-making, planning, and placement which has been adopted by schools in 16 Michigan counties is briefly described. The document lists 11 conclusions concerning the state of vocational and career guidance and makes five recommendations for the Michigan State Board of Education. Sixteen references are included. (NB)

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OUR YOUTH NEED CAREER/VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

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State Advisory Council for Vocational Education

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Introduction

Employment is the backbone of a healthy society. People without productive work are a drain on the economy and a threat to society. Major changes are taking place in the workplace. Some economists expect our economy to undergo an economic and political shock due to new technology, stiff international competition and demographic shifts. Will our youth be able to meet the needs of a changed labor market or will they become part of a growing underclass with little hope for employment? In addition to changes in the labor force, we see:(1)

1. The number of youth (16-24 years old) entering the workforce will decrease as the number of minorities as a percentage of the youth workforce increases.

2. The number of high school drop-outs will increase. Presently, the National drop-out rate is twenty-five percent (25%) and is approaching fifty percent (50%) for inner-city youth.

3. Teenage pregnancy will become more common than ever. One half of these teenage mothers will never complete high school.

4. Youth unemployment is expected to increase, even though the absolute numbers of young people are on the decline. This is largely attributed to continued ineffective vocational counseling and job placement and lack of basic literacy skills of youth, particularly minorities.

Problem

The implications for career/vocational guidance and counseling are enormous. It is no longer sufficient to prepare a student with skills for a specific occupation since that occupation may not exist in ten years. Students must be provided the ability to adapt and transfer skills in a changing environment. The workforce will require better labor market information and improved counseling, testing and assessment services. Youth must be provided with information on job opportunities as early as junior high so they can explore occupational clusters. Equally as important, they need sound advice based on their interests, aptitudes and other assessment tools concerning those occupational areas for which they may be best suited. Lack of career knowledge and a plan for attaining such goals contributes to poor work attitudes, job hopping and affects long-term earnings.

Much of the responsibility of ensuring that all students systematically plan their education and career paths falls on the shoulders of guidance counselors. However, there is immense disparity between the assistance counselors are providing and the guidance needs of youth. We see:

1. Counselor to student ratios of 400-1 which promote inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

2. Piecemeal guidance services, such as assistance primarily focused on the college-bound student or therapeutic counseling.

3. A host of reports calling for an increase in academics for high school graduation which support counselors' inclinations to steer students away from vocational education. At the same time disadvantaged students need services to overcome the obstacles not being addressed by the education reform movement.

4. Counselors performing irrelevant tasks, such as discipline, hall monitoring and paper shuffling or quasi-administrative tasks.

5. Counselors with little preparation or inservice in the area of career/vocational guidance.

6. Counselor's inability to utilize up-to-date labor market information and a lack of any work experience or contact with the real work world (business, industry and labor).

All of this is happening when national and state studies indicate that the American public is demanding more vocational education. Parents and students are indicating a need for career guidance and planning. Even more concerning is the length of time that has passed since these inconsistencies have been identified and very little progress has been made over a ten (10) to twenty (20) year time span to correct the situation.

Need (Twenty Year Span of Documentation)

In December 1965, the U. S. Office of Education supported a major conference entitled "The Vocational Aspects of Counselor Education". Participants in this conference proposed changes in counselor preparation that are as relevant today as they were then. These changes included greater attention to career development theory and practice, business-labor-education cooperation, curriculum development, field experiences and placement services.

In 1984 Ronald Frederickson, a professor and director of the School Consulting and Counseling Psychology Program, University of Massachusetts, stated: "An embarrassing problem exists for practitioners in the vocational guidance field. In study after study, survey after survey, students report receiving little or no career information or help in planning a career."(2) Chapman and Katz (1983) reported in a recent survey that only

about fifty percent (50%) of the secondary school students sampled, stated that they had spoken with a counselor about occupations. At the same time career information and guidance should be one of the top priority goals of most counselors in secondary and postsecondary institutions.(3)

This problem might, in part, be a reflection of the preparation counselors receive in the dissemination and use of career information. Bradley (1973) suggested the need for more courses in career information and vocational guidance rather than the typical one course in occupations and placement for a master's degree. No less than eight (8) authors in the 1970's recognized the inadequacies of counselor education in the area of career/vocational guidance practice. "Career information is too frequently viewed as a passive ingredient that is simply available and seldom an integral part of the career/vocational counseling session. The counselor, in either one-to-one or small group sessions, perhaps fail to convey the vitality and necessity of career information. Counselors, as well as teachers, need to realize that career information serves a number of purposes, both for society and for the individual".(4)

"Career guidance has consistently been seen as a high-priority need by youth, their parents, school boards, the private sector and the general public. Such expectations were at an all-time high in 1984. As these expectations have risen, so has the difficulty of the task facing the professional school counselor".(5)

The 1984 and 1986 Nationwide Gallop Polls have shown a dramatic increase in the public's request for vocational education. Eighty-three percent (83%) felt that vocational education should be required for those students not going on to college, and thirty-seven percent (37%) felt it should be required for students planning to attend college.(6)

Citizens and students in Michigan are also indicating a corresponding request for more vocational education. In the First Annual Opinion Survey of Michigan High School Students (1985), students identified the need for job training as a high priority. Seventy-two percent (72%) of all sophomores and sixty-two percent (62%) of all seniors identified job training as a need.(7)

At the same time that the need for career/vocational guidance and vocational education is great, counselors are indicating a long term inability to address these needs. A 1977 ACT "National Counselor Want Survey" results indicated counselors desired renewal training in the areas of individual and group counseling, consultation skills, career guidance skills and evaluation of counseling and guidance program effectiveness. A similar study conducted in Michigan some nine (9) years later (1986), showed that counselors and administrators identified similar <u>weaknesses</u> in their secondary and postsecondary programs in the following rank ordered categories:

1. Group Processes (group counseling and information dissemination via group meetings) 55%

2. Placement into the World of Work (including kinds of work and methods of training required) 54%

3. Career/Vocational Counseling (career awareness, exploration and decision-making) 53%

4. Guidance Program Development (develop, implement, manage and evaluate program delivery) 50%

It is important to note that these same individuals perceived their strengths to be in the area of educational counseling (placing students in further educational settings) 76%; and helping students with program planning and course selection, 64%. The study concludes that "practitioners and administrators agree that guidance and counseling programs are not helping those students who want to move into the labor market and those who may be less successful in school and academic tasks."(8)

Each day students are exposed to a wide range of competing demands for their time and attention--television programs, advertising claims, pressure from peers, and demands of authority figures. Students must relate to others and deal with the changes, both within themselves and in the world around them. Helping students to respond positively to everyday life events and to plan their futures is a concern of school personnel.

Every adult at the school plays some role in the student's personal and social development. Counselors, social workers, administrators and other support personnel have a responsibility for providing assistance to students in the areas of personal and social growth, as well as, academic and career planning and development. Although these individuals are committed to this effort, their skills are not fully utilized within a comprehensive career/vocational guidance program. Existing guidance programs are too often oriented toward reacting to individual student problems rather than preventing them, and services are not integrated into the total educational system.

We cannot divide students into segments. We cannot deal with basic skills and ignore the student's self-concept, needs, interests and abilities. It is meaningless to improve the curricula if students receive no help in understanding what courses they need to take to prepare them for a productive future. Providing students with an individualized education/employment development plan is a vital service. It allows the educational system to become learner centered and it is particularly important for "at-risk-youth", whose only guidance may come through the school.

What is Happening

In the federal legislative arena, the 1984 Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act has provided additional impetus for comprehensive career guidance programs, organized and administered by certified counselors. This legislation expands the role of counselors to include career guidance programs that assist individuals to acquire self-assessment, career planning, career decision-making, and employability skills for all students. The legislation calls for improvement and expansion of career guidance and counseling programs to meet the career development, vocational education, and employment needs of all students.(9)

The College Board just released the result of its two year study of counseling. The Board made eight recommendations, four designed to place the service in the mainstream of school programs, and four intended to develop community support for school initiatives.(10)

The Board said schools should:

- Establish a process to determine the particular guidance and counseling needs of students and to plan how to meet those needs. Planning must be systematic and involve teachers, parents and others who influence students.

- Develop programs under the leadership of school principals that emphasize the importance of the guidance counselor as a monitor and promoter of student potential, in addition to coordinating a guidance program.

- Institute programs to inform and involve parents, who influence students' plans. Disadvantaged families in particular need programs that encourage them to see college for their children as realistic and achievable.

- Provide a program of guidance and counseling in elementary and secondary schools, a proposal reflecting the commission's belief that early experiences are a major factor in later student academic achievement.

The Board also said that:

- Collaboration among schools, community agencies, colleges and businesses should be increased. Social service agencies could provide staff to help counselors meet the emotional and physical needs of students, while businesses could establish mentorship programs to help students make career choices.

- Statewide task forces should be formed to seek added support, including more funding, from state government for guidance programs.

- Programs that help disadvantaged students enter and remain in college, such as Talent Search and Upward Bound, should be united under a new title in the Higher Education Act to encourage colleges and schools to develop programs that foster student interest in college.

- The training of school counselors should be revised to include the specific skills and knowledge necessary to increase their effectiveness. . .

In Michigan, the movement towards excellence in education caused Superintendent Phillip Runkel to form a Study Committee on Guidance and Counseling to identify the necessary steps to strengthen guidance and counseling programs and practices in order to enhance learning. The result of this committee has been a State Board of Education Policy and Position Paper on

Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling. This policy document was developed to reinforce a common core of expectations found in the Michigan School Code, Michigan K-12 Guidance and Counseling Program Standards of Quality, and Standards of Quality for Michigan Adult Education. The document emphasizes parameters for quality statewide and local comprehensive guidance and counseling programs to include well-defined counselor roles, clearly written program goals and objectives, a guidance team approach, activities and experiences that promote student career and educational development plans, and procedures for a periodic assessment and evaluation that facilitate program improvement.(11)

Effective education, that is, learner-centered, requires an individualized education/employability development plan that is implemented by a comprehensive guidance program (K-14).

Within the context of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program, career guidance is an integral component that is interrelated with academic and vocational programs. When carried out optimally, career guidance provides critical support to the goals of instruction including the systematic development in all individuals those skills and attitudes for responsible self-management and rational self-direction. This statement and the following text is from a recently developed "State Career Guidance Plan" which may be field tested in Michigan in 1987.(12)

To accomplish such a formidable array of career development teaching and learning tasks requires that guidance counselors, career counselors, other guidance personnel, administrators and teachers design a developmental career guidance program that extends through secondary education. Clearly the key person for providing leadership in developing a career guidance program is the counselor by virtue of special training relating to student personnel development. However, a team approach consisting of other professionals within the school environment as well as members from the community, business and industry, ought to form the nucleus of program providers. Given this approach, the role of the counselor shifts from a passive, reactive role to one of being proactive in initiating processes whereby individuals develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for education planning, career planning, and placement. Further, the provision of career development learning tasks perpetuates accountability through measurable product outcomes. Seen in this light, career guidance is viewed in a program mode rather than an ancillary services mode; that is, a career guidance program is a positive collection of individuals, places and things working together to accomplish predetermined and mutually agreed upon outcomes.

Given the concept of a career guidance and counseling "program," with an emphasis on career development learner tasks outcomes, provides substantial credence to the development and implementation of a career guidance curriculum as a logical delivery mechanism. The counselor and other guidance personnel enter into a collaborative relationship to include teachers, parents and community resource persons. Collaboration means planning a developmental career guidance curriculum and securing commitment and mutual responsibility for program operation. A collaborative developmental approach to career guidance removes counselor(s) from unilateral delivery;

rather, counselors will team with teachers and others to design developmental learning experiences, to participate in the implementation of program components, and to provide information on the effectiveness of each component. This structure provides for a dynamic career guidance program that can be modified; further, an integrated curriculum approach assures across-the-student participation in guidance activities occurring on a planned, regular basis.

It is important to note at this point that Michigan is not without some excellent programs. Most noteworthy is the VanBuren Intermediate School District's exemplary Career Guidance Program which was selected through a peer review system as one of seven programs nationally recognized by the United States Department of Education.(13)

This comprehensive guidance program is designed to teach all youth and adults the career development skills of information gathering, decision-making, planning and placement. Students are taught to identify their interests and abilities. They investigate career options and education requirements through a variety of experiences (reading, simulations and internships). Working one-on-one with a counselor, they make tentative decisions about careers and training. With the counselor's assistance, they develop Employability Development Plans (EDP's), a narrative format that outlines classes and work experiences based on their individual needs, which will to move them closer to their goals. The plans are reviewed each year by the student and counselor and finally converted to a resume as the goals are attained. The skills the students develop through this process can be recycled throughout their lives.

The following are the program benefits:

- Students identify their interests and abilities, use a variety of information sources, make more effective decisions about careers and education, complete written plans that outline steps for goals attained, and monitor their progress towards their goals.
- Teachers have students that understand the relationship of a program to future goals.
- Counselors have a management system to help students.
- Administrators and school boards can better plan program offerings.
- Parents get feedback on student goals and program selection.
- Employers have input into the educational process for better prepared employees.

This model has been adopted by schools in sixteen Michigan counties.

The initiatives underway in Michigan are encouraging. However, the educational community has known what the problem has been and still is today;

what the needs were and still are today; and most importantly, what actions need to be taken.

Of great concern to the State Advisory Council for Vocational Education is that numerous other papers, studies, surveys, articles, committees, boards, etc., stating similar concerns and needs over a 10-20 year span are to a great degree "all talk and no action." We believe this paper offers a solution. We need to act decisively. We can no longer afford to have our youth become lost in the shuffle. The time for us to take action is-- NOW!

Conclusions

- The demographic, social and educational trends of the era are causing a greater disparity between what society and the labor market are going to need by the year 2000 and the number of literate and competent youth being produced by the educational system.

- The American public is dramatically increasing its request for vocational education.

- Michigan students have indicated job training as a high priority.

- Correspondingly, parents and students are also indicating a need for career/vocational guidance and counseling.

- Educational agencies are providing piecemeal guidance services most likely due to three major factors: (1) lack of counselor preparation in career guidance including world of work experience; (2) the increase of administrative tasks, and other non-related functions that counselors are bogged down with, which in turn, steal valuable time that should be used with students; and (3) ineffective counselor to student ratios which make group or individual contact impossible except on a crisis basis.

- Lack of standards, old and/or inappropriate counselor pre- and inservice training programs and no periodic evaluation of counselor education programs.

- Educators, parents, students and administrators know that there is a need for a comprehensive guidance program with a career/vocational component, yet programs are implemented sporadically.

- There are numerous career/vocational guidance models, programs and materials. One nationally recognized model is in Michigan, yet little incentive is being provided to local education agencies to adapt/adopt such a model.

- Little incentive is being provided to local education agencies to become learner centered by providing each student with an individual learning plan based on his/her career and educational goals.

- Thus far, there has been much talk and very little action. Education must become far more responsive in the area of career/vocational guidance and counseling.

- All education institutions must undertake an immediate effort to increase the number of career/vocational informed counselors and to upgrade both the availability and quality of counseling and guidance services.

Recommendations

1. The State Board of Education should immediately implement its Policy and Position Paper on Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs. To ensure expedient implementation of the Board's paper, an ad hoc Committee should be established to prioritize the state level recommendations, identify specific action with measurable outcomes and provide the board with a biannual progress report. Priority should be given to the review of counselor education programs and the review of counselor endorsement rules (State Level recommendations 9 and 10).

2. The State Board of Education should immediately establish a temporary technical assistance training center or program which addresses the self-identified weaknesses of counselors. This center or program could be phased out when Michigan Department of Education recommendations have been accomplished.

3. The State Board of Education should recommend to the Legislature that it include the development of an individualized student learning plan as part of its High School Incentive Program and increase the $28 per Student State School Aid supplement as an incentive. The plan would identify academic and vocational-technical competencies to be achieved to meet each student's career and educational goals.

4. The State Board of Education should provide technical assistance and incentives to districts that want to adapt or adopt a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Those schools which are presently leaders in this area should be utilized as models and resources.

5. The State Board of Education should encourage local education agencies to collaborate with other agencies, schools and the private sector to implement a comprehensive guidance program, by providing information on how to leverage funds to coordinate counseling services with agencies/programs such as: Social Services, Health, JTPA, special education, and vocational education.

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Other Resources

(a) Testimony Provided to the State Advisory Council for Vocational Education, at the Kent Skills Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan, April 18, 1986, by Scott D. Whitener, Ph.D., Associate Dean, School of Education, Ferris State College.

(b) Testimony Provided to the State Advisory Council for Vocational Education, the Council's Public Meeting, October 16, 1986, Jackson, Michigan by John Nidelcheff (retired), former director of the Jackson Area Career Center.

Additional copies may be obtained from the State Advisory Council for Vocational Education, Michigan Department of Education, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, Michigan 48909, (517/373-6407).

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